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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; VENEZUELAN REFERENDUM; BOLIVIA; ARGENTINE
FUTURE FOREIGN POLICY; 12/03/07

11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international stories include the outcome of the Venezuelan referendum; the chaos in Bolivia; and the Cristina Kirchner's administration future foreign policy.

12. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "A Myth"

Paula Lugones, international columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (12/03) "In almost nine years of Hugo Chavez in power, this is the first time the president's proposal is not a clear front-runner in an election.

"Yesterday's outcome shows a clear declination in the votes Chavez obtained and an encouraging message for the opposition.

"So far, anti-Chavists had taken refuge in a senseless diatribe and they had never been able to form a consolidated and reliable front vis-`-vis a president that opened the doors of his project to the poor while his authoritarian air irritated well-off sectors.

"Now, the opposition sees a light - it was quite clear in Manuel Rosales' rare conciliating message for the Venezuelan people. For the first time, they felt that the myth of Chavez invincibility could be demolished."

- "The US urges Venezuelans to vote and has doubts about transparency"

Hugo Alconada Mon, daily-of-record "La Nación's" Washington-based correspondent, comments (12/02) "The US wants Venezuelans to vote in a massive way. However, it is also mistrustful about the transparency of the process and the vote count, just like about everything related to Venezuelan Hugo Chavez or his 'regime,' which the White House, Republicans and Democrats alike see increasingly further from democracy.

"The US Department of State... asked Venezuelans to exercise their 'inalienable right to express their will in a democratic way in a climate of tolerance, without intimidation or violence,' instead of abstaining from voting.

"... The reasons for mistrust towards Chavez are several in Washington - among others, his ties to Iran, his negotiations with the FARC... and his influence in Bolivia, as well as his ties to Cuba, Nicaragua and Ecuador, his threats to foreign investment and his use of oil as a political weapon.

"Nonetheless, Chavez has also become a political tool for the White

House, which invokes him to promote its own agenda in an excluding way - you are either with Bush or with Caracas. In this way, number two at the Department of State, John Negroponte, asked Democratic-controlled Congress to approve FTAs with Colombia, Peru and Panama."

- "Violence in Bolivia"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" (12/03) "Since Evo Morales took over the Bolivian presidency, the country's social peace has gradually deteriorated until reaching its current situation of high-tension, which ended up in a wave of violent confrontation.

"... The truth is that Bolivia is today going through a true limit situation, which is on the verge of the rupture of democracy, with a highly polarized population in two postures that seem irreconcilable..."

"Following the swift approval of the misleading new Constitution..., six of the nine departments of the country staged a 24-hour protest demonstration and called to civil disobedience.

"... Given his arrogance, Morales seems to have lost credibility, and this is why the opposition is asking for the participation of the Catholic Church in negotiations. The church is one of the few institutions that still enjoy the respect of most Bolivians..."

"... The risk posed to the peace of the region seems to have substantially increased. Argentina should at least offer its mediation for a re-encounter."

- "Will (Argentina's) foreign policy change?"

Leading "Clarín" (12/03) carries an op-ed piece by Fabian Calle and Federico Merke, professors of international relations (UCA, UTDT and USAL universities), who write "Nestor Kirchner's foreign policy was

focused on four main points... - the restructuring of the country's foreign debt and the payment of the debt to the IMF..., its ties to Bolivia, its ideological rapprochement to Venezuela..., and its distancing from Uruguay due to the conflict over Botnia establishment..."

"The Cristina Kirchner administration will have to be more creative in order to rethink Argentina's international insertion. The global scenario's main feature will be the US withdrawal from Iraq and a less unilateral policy that will be closer to some realistic multilateralism..."

"A crucial point in this regard is that the Democratic Party, the front-runner to access the presidency, does not seem against the verbal escalation with the Bolivarian project. Washington's critical assessment of the Venezuelan leader's project is well-known..."

"In this regard, one of the main challenges of this new stage will be to take advantage of constructive and useful ties to Brasilia, Washington and Caracas in a climate of confrontation between Chavez and the US, Spain and, to a lesser extent, to Brazil.

"... In the context of the spat between Hugo Chavez and King Juan Carlos from Spain, Cristina Kirchner will likely downplay her ideological ties to Caracas, although reinforcing the pragmatic and realistic side of Argentina's ties to Venezuela. This realistic strategy will likely repeat itself towards Mexico as a way to balance Itamaraty's leading role..."

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